

THE **GULL**



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 98 NO. 2 SPRING 2013



GOOD NEWS FOR BIRDS AT ALTAMONT PASS

BY MIKE LYNES

Years of advocacy on behalf of raptors at Altamont Pass are paying off—with a dramatic reduction in bird mortality there. Deaths of four key raptor species from Altamont wind turbines dropped by an estimated 50 percent between 2005 and 2010, according a report by the independent Scientific Review Committee of the Alameda County Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area.

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Charles Denson

Mike Lynes.

BIRDATHON 2013—MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

BY MIKE LYNES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Each year, the month of April brings spring migration...and Golden Gate Audubon's annual Birdathon. It's a great chance for our supporters to get outside and bird for a cause. If you haven't signed up yet, it's not too late! (See www.goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon for complete details.)

Birdathon is an excellent example of how Golden Gate Audubon members contribute to the organization. It merges the fun of birding with a collective effort to support what we do to protect Bay Area birds.

I know it's not easy to ask friends for

money. But give it a try—when you tell people how much GGAS does on behalf of Bay Area birds and nature education, most will be happy to donate. And this year, we have volunteers ready to support you in getting Birdathon pledges.

The success of Birdathon is more important than ever. As we explained in the November *Gull*, Golden Gate Audubon has struggled since the recession to operate on a balanced budget. Last year, we ran a deficit of nearly \$100,000.

Our board of directors has acted decisively to address the problem, making

painful but necessary staffing cuts. Many of you have stepped up in a big way to fill the gaps. Some members have upped their personal donations to help offset decreases in grant revenue. Others are giving immense amounts of time as office volunteers, Eco-Education docents, or conservation advocates.

With your help, we have remained—and will remain—an active and strong advocate for Bay Area conservation. Even with the staffing changes, we have recently submitted extensive comment letters on a range of issues including dog management in the San Francisco Presidio, the future of Berkeley's Aquatic Park, the Avian Protection Program for the Altamont Pass, and City of Alameda development plans that could have long-range impacts on the endangered California Least Terns.

I know we ask a lot of our members, and I want to be sure you feel that Golden Gate Audubon is representing your interests in bird conservation and education. Help us succeed by joining our Conservation Committees, volunteering with our Eco-Education program, or just dropping me an email sharing what you like—or don't like—about what we're doing.

Thank you for the kind welcome I've received since becoming executive director in December, and for the generous outpouring of support, both financially and in volunteer time. I'm confident that we are headed in the right direction. Together we will continue Golden Gate Audubon's tradition of excellence in advocacy and education for many more Aprils, and many more spring migrations, to come.

NEWS BRIEFS

Now Online

Visit our website to read Bruce Mast's expanded Observations column, our full schedule of local field trips, and our blog, *Golden Gate Birder*. We can send the blog and the monthly field trips e-newsletter right to your inbox. To sign up, contact Ilana at idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

2012 Oakland CBC Results Available

Final results from the 2012 Oakland Christmas Bird Count are now on our website: 100,666 individual birds and 178 species (or 180 if you include the full count week). Thanks to the 216 people who counted. See www.goldengateaudubon.org/cbc for full details.

Birding Far Afield

Spaces are available in several of the trips in our Travel with Golden Gate Audubon program. Rich Cimino of Yellowbilled Tours leads two trips, May 5–11 and May 12–18, to Wisconsin during peak migration and also a series of five-day trips to Nome, Alaska, departing May 28, June 1, June 5, June 9, and June 13. Harry Fuller offers a tour, June 21–24, to the Siskiyou Mountains and Cascade Range of Oregon. The trip also includes the Klamath Basin. Northern New Mexico is the destination of Rich Cimino's five-day trips on August 5–9 and August 11–15. For details, go to www.goldengateaudubon.org/field-trips/travel-with-golden-gate-audubon.



Melanie Hofmann/www.cafepress.com/melaniemle

UC BERKELEY BOTANICAL GARDEN

BY CHRIS CARMICHAEL AND PHILA ROGERS

The garden's rich floral display yields hummingbirds year-round.

Stawberry Canyon has it all—a vigorous year-round stream, lush riparian vegetation that follows the stream, and surrounding hillsides with native coastal chaparral and open grasslands. The UC Berkeley Botanical Garden, located on 36 acres at the upper end of the canyon, features not only the stream and the riparian habitat but extensive collections of plants from around the world. Its publication, “Birds of the UC Botanical Garden,” lists 100 species, many of which are year-round residents. Others are seasonal residents, and some are casual visitors.

In the winter, the garden is full of wintering sparrows along with Hermit Thrushes, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and gaudy Red-breasted Sapsuckers. Most winters, Varied Thrushes can be heard and sometimes seen in the garden’s denser areas. In the spring, the canyon and the garden resound with glorious songs from breeding singers like Black-headed Grosbeaks, Warbling Vireos, and the Pacific Wren.

Local native birds have adapted well to the garden’s exotic plants. “Certain plants seem to act as bird magnets,” explains Chris Carmichael, associate director of horticulture and collections. “One such plant is the honey bush (*Melianthus major*) in the South African area. The dark maroon blossoms are favored by nectar feeders such as Hooded Orioles. I’ve also seen Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Townsend’s Warblers, Dark-eyed Juncos, Song Sparrows, California and Spotted Towhees, Steller’s Jays, and Black-headed Grosbeaks visiting the melianthus.”

The garden’s rich floral display yields hummingbirds year-round. “Both Anna’s and Allen’s Hummingbirds are breeders, with Rufous Hummingbirds coming through during migration,” Chris notes. “Rufous Hummingbirds have been known to spend the winter, often favoring flowers in the Mexican and Central American areas. Hooded Orioles, which arrive in the spring, nest in the palms in the Cycad and Palm Garden surrounding the Conference Center. They generally choose one of the many fan palms. They are clearly adaptable, using non-native palms, as our specimens of native *Washingtonia filifera* are still too small to host nesting orioles.”

Golden Gate Audubon and the garden are cosponsoring a second annual bird sit, on Monday, April 8, at 9 a.m. Emphasis will be on quiet listening—not only to individual birdsongs and calls but also to the rich acoustical environment of stream and wind sounds. The trip is limited to 15 people. Contact gardenprograms@berkeley.edu or 510.642.7082 to register.

Birders visiting the botanical garden can see prints of Melanie Hofmann’s bird photos in the garden store.

200 Centennial Drive, Berkeley 510.643.2755 <http://botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu>.



Melanie Hofmann/www.cafepress.com/melaniemle

(Clockwise from top left) Anna’s Hummingbird; Allen’s Hummingbird; Black-headed Grosbeak.

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH BIRDATHON VOLUNTEERS

BY ILANA DEBARE

Birdathon is our biggest fundraiser of the year, with trips throughout April. It couldn't happen without volunteers—field trip leaders, trip participants, and organizers. Here are profiles of three Birdathon trip leaders.

Chris and Gary Bard

Alameda

Saturday, April 6

Chris and Gary Bard see their island home of Alameda as one of the Bay Area's hidden birding secrets. "For two of the last three years, someone came on our Birdathon trip specifically because they had never been to Alameda," Gary says. "Afterward, they kept the little map I produced so they could come back and find the places again."

Chris and Gary have birding skills that compliment each other. "He's a very good spotter," says Chris, a retired elementary school media specialist. "And she's a good identifier," adds Gary, a former deputy fire chief and avalanche safety instructor.

On their Birdathon trip, Chris and Gary plan to touch all of Alameda's habitats: beach, marsh, open water, and city parks. Shorebirds are a certainty, and past years have also yielded nesting hummingbirds, Cooper's Hawks, and Peregrine Falcons.

Their trip isn't one of the ultra-competitive ones. "It's for fun," Chris says.

But the birding *fun* has also led to *funds*. Last year, their trip was the sixth-highest fundraising group in all of Birdathon.

"I like to support an organization that's helping to conserve birds and other wildlife," says Chris. "It's wonderful to see wildlife in places like Africa, but birds are everywhere."



Chris and Gary Bard.

Glen Tepke

Oakland

Sunday April 21

Make sure you've had a big shot of caffeine before joining one of Glen Tepke's Birdathon trips. They are whirlwinds, aimed at setting records and winning prizes.

"The biggest difference from casual birding is that you don't spend time looking at a bird once you identify it," Glen says. "You move on and look for other birds. If there's something we haven't seen before, we'll stand there and look for a minute. But not for 10 minutes!"

Glen, a manager with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, led three Birdathon trips last year, including one that won second place in the Alameda County Big Day category. Another of his trips tallied 98 species, all within the city of Oakland. This year he hopes to beat that total.

"I won't predict 110 species, but I'd be happy with it," he says.

Glen won't disclose his exact Birdathon route for competitive reasons. "Trade secrets," he says.

Why Oakland?

"Of course it's where I live," he says. "But it's surprisingly birdy for such an urbanized area. It's got a wide variety of habitats. And it's inspirational to see birds as urban pioneers, maintaining a foothold in this otherwise hostile habitat we've created."

It's not too late to sign up for a Birdathon trip! Go to www.goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon for information and a schedule of trips.



Glen Tepke on St. Paul Island, Alaska.

Jonathan Franzen

UPCOMING EVENTS

Celebrating the Clapper Rail

Oakland

Saturday, May 18, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

As part of Endangered Species Day, we'll celebrate the California Clapper Rail during our May habitat restoration at Arrowhead Marsh at the MLK Jr. Regional Shoreline. Other workdays at Arrowhead, held every third Saturday, take place this spring on April 20 and June 15.

Birdathon Awards Dinner

Oakland

Sunday, May 19, 1–4 p.m.

Share Birdathon stories or just enjoy the company of Audubon friends at our annual Birdathon dinner. This year, we'll gather at a beautiful private home bordering Redwood Regional Park in Oakland. Register online at www.goldengateaudubon.org/birdathon2013-dinner.

Return of the Terns

Alameda

Saturday, June 15

Reservations are needed for this popular annual tour of the colony of nesting California Least Terns at the Alameda Wildlife Refuge, which is normally closed to the public. Buses leave from the Crab Cove Visitor Center. Check www.ebparks.org/ activities over the upcoming weeks for details.

CONTINUED from page 1

The estimated number of Golden Eagles killed by turbines each year fell from 58 to 33, Burrowing Owls from 543 to 233, American Kestrels from 415 to 268, and Red-tailed Hawks from 196 to 85. These figures are rough estimates: it's exceedingly difficult to track exact numbers of bird deaths on the sprawling Altamont Pass. Although the data indicate a decline in risks to birds, bird injuries and deaths are likely to always result from wind turbine operations.

But the findings are still very good news. They show that careful siting and design of wind turbines can significantly reduce the risk to birds. The results also show the positive impact that Audubon activists can have in pressuring wind companies to protect birds at Altamont Pass.

The roots of this story go back more than a decade, to when Golden Gate Audubon joined other Bay Area chapters, including Santa Clara Valley, Ohlone, Marin, and Mt. Diablo, to advocate for birds and other wildlife at the Altamont Pass. (Other conservation groups, including the Center for Biological Diversity, have also stood up to help protect birds at Altamont.)

The oldest wind farm in the country, Altamont had about 5,000 turbines in the area bordering Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Researchers estimated that thousands of birds—some migrants, some year-round residents—were dying from collisions with wind towers and blades.



First-generation turbines have latticed towers that attract some raptors.



Red-tailed Hawk, a common raptor at Altamont Pass.

Careful siting and design of wind turbines can significantly reduce the risk to birds.

In 2004, we and our partners sued Alameda County for reissuing wind turbine permits in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area without conducting any environmental review. The settlement required a 50 percent reduction in bird mortality by 2009, removal of certain high-risk turbines, and development of a comprehensive conservation plan.

In 2010, when the 50 percent reduction had not been reached, we pursued further negotiations with NextEra Inc., the largest wind operator at Altamont Pass. NextEra agreed to replace its old turbine fleet with new turbines that we believe are safer for birds, and to provide \$2.5 million for habitat conservation and research to reduce bird mortality.

Since then, NextEra has replaced about a third of its old turbines and is moving ahead with plans to replace the rest of its fleet. The newer turbines are much larger but fewer in number, leading to a net decrease of 338 turbines in the first phase alone. Before the new turbines go in the ground, biologists and engineers work to site them in areas that will decrease collision risks for birds. For example, new turbines are not placed in low saddles or at the edge of ridges, where raptors often prefer to fly. The new turbines

have solid tube bodies rather than the latticed towers that served as attractive but perilous perches for some raptors.

These changes are just a starting point. NextEra still needs to switch over the remaining two-thirds of its turbines. The other operators at Altamont have not yet started to replace their old turbines. Even with the changeover (or “repowering,” as it is called), wildlife remains at risk. We need to continue monitoring Altamont’s bird and bat populations, and pressing for better ways to safeguard them. The next report with more recent mortality data is expected to be available this spring.

We couldn’t do this without your support. If you’ve been a member or donor to Golden Gate Audubon over the years, take a moment to pat yourself on the back. Your commitment and generosity have made a genuine difference for eagles, owls, and other birds at Altamont Pass. And if this success becomes a model for the wind industry, you will have made a difference for birds in wind power areas around the world.

The 2005–2010 Monitoring Report is available at http://altamontsrc.org/alt_doc/m87_draft_2010_2011_bird_year_monitoring_report.pdf.

SPEAKER SERIES



Yellow-eared Parrot.

ALASKA—THE BREEDING GROUNDS FOR THE FLYWAYS

NILS WARNOCK

Did you know that Alaska supports more than 80 percent of all the seabirds nesting in the United States? And that close to a third of the world's shorebird species come to Alaska to breed? Nils Warnock will talk about the many ways that Alaska is important to different bird populations and will present amazing examples of how the state's birds migrate to all continents. He will also highlight some of Audubon's conservation work in the state.

Nils Warnock, executive director of Audubon Alaska since 2010, has spent most of the past 30 years studying the ecology of Pacific Flyway birds, with a particular emphasis on shorebirds and migration. He lives in Anchorage, Alaska.

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, May 16
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program



Milo Burcham

Western Sandpipers on the Copper River Delta.

COLOMBIA: LAND OF BIRDS

CHRISTOPHER CALONJE

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, April 18
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

Join guide Christopher Calonje for a photographic tour of Colombia and its birdlife, while learning about the country's geography, cuisine, culture, and people. Colombia boasts the world's longest list of birds, now over 1,890 species (more than North America and Europe combined). Much of this diversity is due to the country's complex topography, which includes three Andean ranges and their valleys, Atlantic and Pacific coasts, vast grasslands bordering Venezuela, and a large portion of the Amazon Basin. Chris will discuss the country's improving security situation and how birding in Colombia promotes responsible environmental and social ecotourism as well as providing an opportunity of a lifetime for birders.

Christopher Calonje was born and raised in Cali, Colombia, and earned a degree in natural resources planning from Humboldt State University. He has been conducting birding tours in his native country for many years and has traveled widely photographing Colombia's amazing avian diversity.

LOCATION / DATE

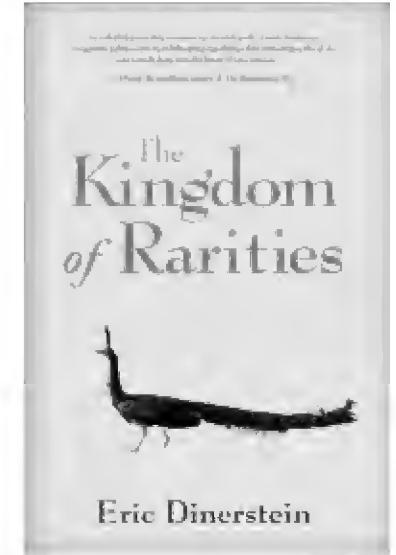
San Francisco
Thursday, June 20
7 p.m. refreshments
7:30 p.m. program

THE KINGDOM OF RARITIES

ERIC DINERSTEIN

When you look out your window, why are you so much more likely to see a robin or a sparrow than a Kirtland's Warbler or a California Condor? Why are some animals naturally rare and others so abundant? Eric Dinerstein will discuss his book, an eye-opening tour of the rare and exotic. It offers a new understanding of the natural world, one that places rarity at the center of conservation biology.

Eric Dinerstein is the lead scientist and vice president for conservation science at the World Wildlife Fund. The program is cohosted by the World Wildlife Fund and Island Press.



Eric Dinerstein

2013 VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION PICNIC

You Are Invited!

Our annual volunteer event will be held Saturday, June 15, 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m., at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. We are not mailing paper invitations and, instead, will send email invitations. If we may not have your correct email address, let us know. RSVP by June 1 so we can provide directions to the specific location.

Contact Noreen Weeden, nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org or 510.301.0570.

San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.uusf.org/visitors_faq.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.

DONATIONS

Thank you for your generous donations to support our many conservation, education, and member activities!

Donations from November 28, 2012, to February 28, 2013

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

415.681.7422

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. The board of directors meets six times per year (schedule can be obtained from the office).

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**3 Bay Area Hotspot:
UC Berkeley Botanical Garden**

Visit in spring to see Anna's and Allen's Hummingbirds, and nesting Hooded Orioles.

4 Meet Birdathon Leaders

Volunteers Chris and Gary Bard and Glen Tepke will introduce you to their special East Bay places. Don't miss Birdathon 2013!

6 Speaker Series:

April: Birding in Colombia. May: Breeding shore- and seabirds in Alaska. June: Rarities and their impact on conservation biology.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Charles Denson

THE CLEVER SCRUB-JAY

BY JUDITH DUNHAM

Wether you look at birds mostly in your backyard or you wander farther afield in the Bay Area, chances are that Western Scrub-Jays will boldly make their presence known.

Our local scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma californica*) is among more than a hundred species in the corvid family worldwide. The birds in this group, also including crows, ravens, and magpies, are known for their intelligence. Researchers in New Zealand, for example, found

that New Caledonian Crows are as adept as chimpanzees at making simple tools and manipulating them to obtain food.

Corvids are equally resourceful at storing, or caching, food. Clark's Nutcrackers, a corvid found in the West at high elevations, gather thousands of seeds from pinecones, hide them over a broad area in preparation for winter, and can retrieve a large percentage, a strategy that enables them to survive until spring. Urban Western Scrub-Jays, which forage for acorns and nuts as well as seeds, do not engage in such Olympic-scale caching. But, like nutcrackers, they create what are called mental maps of their cache locations. If you set out a few shelled peanuts, you can watch the birds find hiding places. They often push a peanut into the ground and then snag a leaf or two or a piece of bark to cover and mark the site. Or they might tuck a peanut in the barely opened, goblet-shaped blossom of a magnolia or angle it into a potted plant on your porch.

Like many corvids, the Western Scrub-Jay likes to raid the caches of its brethren. To avoid being robbed, jays remain vigilant, making sure that others are not watching before they hide their food. Scientists studying the jays observed that they cached at some distance from onlooking birds and even dug up their food and moved it repeatedly out of view. Different studies came up with different interpretations of these behaviors: that the jays could anticipate what other birds might do or that the stress at being watched caused the jays to relocate their cache. In the absence of a definitive conclusion, researchers intend to continue testing their theories.

Western Scrub-Jays never remember all their cache sites. That may be the reason you find a live oak sprouting up in your yard. On the other hand, their forgetfulness has benefits: buried acorns grow into seedlings that rejuvenate a forest.